



NEWS RELEASE

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El Paso Sector agents apprehend fewer immigrants, seize more narcotics in Fiscal Year 2002

EL PASO, Texas -- El Paso Sector apprehensions of illegal immigrants dropped by 16 percent in Fiscal Year 2002, while the volume of seized marijuana and cocaine increased, according to figures released today by the agency.

Statistics show that El Paso Sector Border Patrol agents apprehended 94,256 illegal immigrants in Fiscal Year 2002, which ended September 30. The number of immigrants apprehended in FY '02 represents the lowest volume of apprehensions for a single fiscal year since 1994, the year immediately following the implementation of Operation Hold the Line. Hold-the-Line was responsible for reducing the number of apprehensions in the El Paso Sector by more than 70 percent from the preceding year, according to records supplied by the agency.

The reduction in apprehensions in FY '02 can be attributed to a wide range of factors that led to fewer attempted illegal crossings in the area. These include the "events of September 11th"; increased vigilance and border security tactics that have been deployed since 9-11; and economic variables on both sides of the border.

Statistics also reveal that El Paso Sector agents seized 90 tons of marijuana, 770 pounds of cocaine, and other drugs valued at an estimated \$170.7 million in FY '02. This compares to 85 tons of marijuana and 423 pounds of cocaine, valued at \$151 million, in FY 2001.

"These statistics are even more telling, considering our response to national initiatives in the aftermath of September 11," El Paso Sector Chief Luis Barker said. "It speaks to the resolve and commitment by our agents, of which I am extremely proud," he added.

A total of nine deaths of illegal immigrants were also recorded in FY '02, including four drownings; three by heat exposure; and two unknown. Agents rescued 61 immigrants in distress in '02, primarily in area waterways and confined spaces of vehicles, where immigrants were smuggled by "coyotes". In FY '01, eleven immigrants lost their lives in the El Paso Sector.

Since the attacks on the United States on 9-11-01, El Paso Sector agents have remained on high alert as ordered by the U.S. Attorney General. Border Patrol agents have stepped up their vigilance in the form of intensified patrols along the immediate border; assistance provided to INS at international ports-of-entry; security assistance at U.S. metropolitan airports and at the Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City; and increased communication and exchange of information among law enforcement agencies..

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